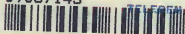




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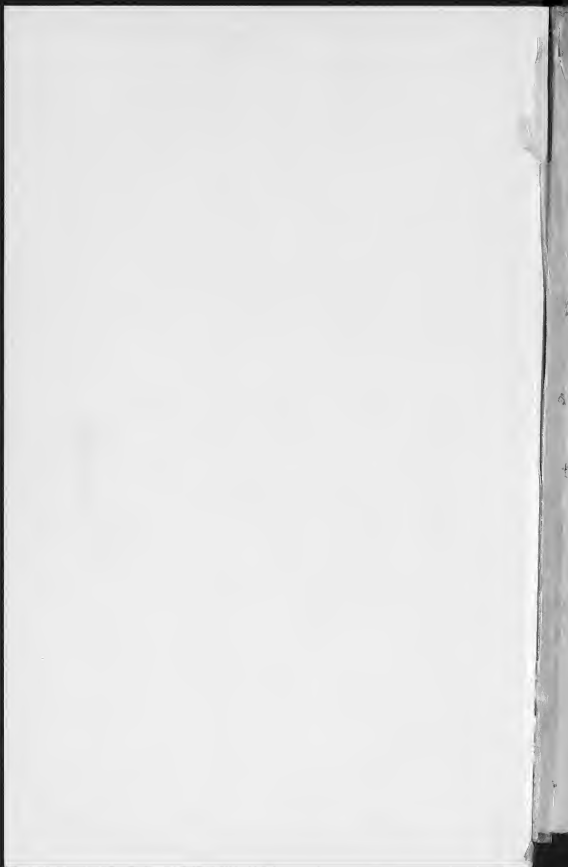


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A
BRIEF EXPOSITION

OF THE

AGRICULTURAL QUESTION.

BY

A FREEHOLDER.

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BRIEF EXPOSITION
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AGRICULTURAL QUESTION.

IT is the first duty, as it is the obvious policy, of a Government, so to provide impartially for the respective interests of the great bodies of men that compose the mass of a people, that the public burthens may bear equally upon all, and that no one order in the state should, for any length of time, enjoy an advantage to the detriment of the rest. It is a sense of the importance of this maxim that at present directs the attention of Society to the pressure upon the Agricultural class, one of the most important members of the

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body politic; but although on this momentous subject, all are eager to declare an opinion, and establish a favourite hypothesis, the question seems scarcely to have been stated with the fairness and candour requisite to an impartial judgment—on one side the depression of the Agricultural class has been represented as imaginary, or attributed to causes at best but partially operative; while on the other hand, should a stranger, unacquainted with our internal economy and the occurrences of the last thirty years, listen only to the speeches at Agricultural Meetings, he must conclude that the great weight of taxation fell almost exclusively on the landed interest—that that alone had sustained the burthen of the war, and alone suffered by the recurrence of peace. Divested of the extraneous matters which the prejudice and passion of political party and private interests intermix with the question of Agricultural Distress, the claim of the Agriculturists to legislative relief is founded on the assumption, that

the burthens occasioned by the late war press in an unjust and undue proportion upon them, while they would either deny or suppress that they profited in an equal degree with other classes of the community, by its advantages. This is a question of fact; and fortunately susceptible of almost mathematical demonstration.

In order to ascertain this fact, let us, in the first place, enquire the money value of agricultural produce and profit in each of the three septennial periods of the war, and the seven years since, as compared with the seven years next before the war commenced, which was, as is well known, a period of great prosperity and increase in the value of land; and consequently a period at which it is advantageous to the case of the landed interest, to make the comparison.

The official returns of rates and prices made to parliament are, of course, to be considered as correct. By the tables appended to the Report of the Committee of

the House of Commons on the Corn Bill Question in 1821, it appears that the average price of wheat for the seven years 1786 to 93 was 46s. $0\frac{1}{7}d.$ per quarter; for 1793 to 1800, 60s. $4\frac{4}{7}d.$ —for 1800 to 1807, 87s. 3d.—for 1807 to 1814, 97s. 5d.—and for 1814 to 1821, 75s. $11\frac{1}{7}d.$ per quarter. To avoid a mass of unimportant figures, I shall reject the small fractions in price, and the parts of a pound in the totals. Let us then suppose the aggregate produce of a certain estate to be equal in value to 100 quarters of wheat, its mean annual amount during the seven years immediately preceding the war was consequently £230. during the first septennial period,

viz.	£
<i>from</i> 1793 to 1800 - -	302.
Second ditto - -	436.
and, Third ditto	487.
That since the war	380.

But while the war elevated the price of farming produce, it also augmented the cost of cultivation. The ratio of increase deduced from returns made to the Board

of Agriculture from upwards of forty counties or districts of the amount of the farmer's outgoings for the years 1793, 1803, and 1813, and given in evidence before the Lords' Committee in 1814, by Mr. Arthur Young, was 33 per cent. in the period 1793 to 1803, and 53 per cent. more in the next period, being together 86 per cent.

Before the economy of Agriculture had been (like most things) deranged by the revolutionary war, it was usual to reckon the farmer's outgoings equal to the rent, and his fair remuneration for capital, skill, &c. as also equal to the rent, thus dividing the total produce into three equal parts—one for the landlord, one for the tenant, and one for outgoings.—Hence then the landlords and tenants joint profit from the supposed estate before the war, was :

	£	£	£	£	£
230. outgoings	77	=	equal to	153	—
1st period } of war. }	302.	ℓ ^o	77+33 per cent	=292,	[increase. being about 31 per cent.
2nd. - -	436.	-ℓ ^a	77+86 - -	=273,	- - = 90 ditto.
3rd. - -	487.	-ℓ ²	77+86 - -	=324,	- - = 124 ditto.
do. since war	380.	-ℓ ²	77+86 - -	=217,	- - = 54 ditto.

or a mean increase on the whole twenty-eight years of a little above 75 per cent. : (a sum considerably below the actual advance of rents, from the omission of the increase of produce by the improvements which art and science have introduced) thus it appears from indisputable evidence that so far from *the war* having pressed with peculiar weight on the landed interest, it was (exclusive of the improvements in husbandry,) a great gainer in consequence of that state of affairs.

Let us now enquire how it stands with relation to the monied interest ; and here it may not be amiss to rectify a mistaken notion prevalent in regard to the description of persons of whom that monied interest is composed. Our popular orators describe it as made up of a few overgrown Capitalists, Loanists, Contractors, and Brokers.—So far, however, from these making up the chief elements of the class, they do not even belong to it ; being dealers and traders in money, just as others are in any other merchandize, and

upon the same principles of risk, profit, and loss, and therefore more properly belonging to the *trading interest*. But the numerous class which forms the monied interest, properly so called, consists of, in the first place, the younger branches of almost all the families of distinction in the nation.—Secondly, most of the learned, literary, and liberal professions.—Thirdly, the aged, infirm, infants, widows and orphans of the provident and industrious of every rank, (in many cases the agricultural class itself) who spent their strength, and talents, and youth, to make a provision for decrepitude, and helplessness, and age ;—and lastly, the servants of the public, whether civil or military, who have laboured, and fought away their lives in the public service.—Such are the individuals composing the monied interest.—It is superfluous to point out either the cruelty, or the injustice of any attack upon their property.

To compare with precision the respective effects of the war on agricultural and

monied capital, let A, representing the landed interest, be supposed to have had previous to the war a clear rent of £1000, a year, and M (the monied interest) an equal income from the dividends of 3 per cent. consols: (and in fact the capital necessary to purchase an equal income of rent or dividend was, in the year 1792, very nearly equal, consols being then almost at par, and freehold lands above 30 years purchase), the effective value of the fixed income was soon and progressively diminished by the war: but as M had no increase of dividend, it is necessary to the parallel, to suppose that A also limited his expenditure to his former rent of £1000. investing the surplus rent, and accruing interest thereon, in the public funds. Now we have seen above, that the mean increase of A's rent was *not less* than 75 per cent. or £750. a year, which being invested with its growing interest, would have amounted at the beginning of 1821 to upwards of £60,000. 3 per cent. consols, paying a dividend of more than £1800. a

year, and now worth £48,000. sterling, and supposing his rent to have fallen from £2240. to £1300. a year, A has now both in capital and income three times as much as M.—Thus circumstanced, would it not be the height of absurdity in A thus to address M? You see how grievously the rent of my patrimonial estate is reduced by the peace, from £2240. to £1300. while the effective value of your dividend (which had been, I allow, more diminished by the war,) is restored in almost an equal ratio. I claim therefore as a matter of equity and justice that you pay me the amount of this your gain by the peace, in diminution of my great loss thereby.” Surely so unjust a request could meet with nothing but contempt. It is indeed true that the monied interest has been benefitted by the peace, because its income is now more effective than it was during the war, when it suffered by a depreciation which augmented the profits of land, (since it raised the nominal rent of money, and enabled the agriculturist to vest his surplus to a

greater advantage, but this *benefit* consists in effect merely in a *diminution of loss*—whereas the loss of the agriculturist, on the contrary, is ^{only} a *diminution of profit*. This profit was, at one period not less, probably, than £150. per cent. on the rent before the war; for though there may have been cases where the maximum elevation of rent was not so much, still in those the tenant had the advantage, the question as here considered comprises necessarily the whole profit, without regard to its subdivided enjoyment. This profit may have since fallen to 50 per cent. but even that more than indemnifies him for the altered value of money; and it is evident that until his rent shall be less in effective value than it was before the war, so far from bearing an undue share of the burthens occasioned by the war, those burthens have in effect hitherto been chiefly sustained by the monied interest. This view of the subject may be not inaptly illustrated, by comparing the kingdom of Great Britain in the

late convulsions of Europe, to an estate threatened by a sudden inroad of the ocean.—The proprietor, deeming that a bulwark would be necessary to prevent its encroachment, and that it was expedient to pledge a part of his revenue for the preservation of the estate, negotiated loans of money, and engaged in the work. As it proceeded, the encreased demand for farming produce, and other circumstances, so encreased his returns that after paying largely towards the work, the proprietor found that his income, instead of being lessened, was augmented, by the enterprise. This being at length triumphantly completed, and the estate not only placed out of danger, but found encreased in extent, and improved both in the quantity and quality of its produce, his revenue, although prices fell back to their natural level, settled at a higher rate than before the attack which had threatened its ruin. It happened, however, that the proprietor, not foreseeing the inevitable fall of prices that must result from the cessation of

the causes of their elevation, had increased his establishment and expenditure in proportion to the maximum increase of his income during its exaggerated prosperity, and was consequently unprepared for, and embarrassed by the necessary change.—If a proprietor, in such a dilemma, should, as an expedient for removing his distress, petition the Chancellor for an injunction to restrain the Creditors and Annuitants, whose exertions and ventures had preserved, improved, and augmented his estate, from demanding the interest due to them, what should we think of the justice or the equity of such an application? Yet is not this virtually the language of some agriculturists?

Such then appears to be the real position of the agricultural in relation to the monied interest; compared with the other great division of national capital, namely, the trading interest, the difference is not so great, but still the balance appears to be in favour of the agricultural interest. The extraordinary circumstances of the

late war gave to trade as well as to agriculture, an unprecedented flow of prosperity, more mixed, indeed, in respect of trade, which, as usual, experienced reverses; but on the whole, its advantages *during the war*, may have been equal to those of agriculture. The re-action, however, consequent to the restoration of peace, overtook the trading interest suddenly; whereas it affected the agricultural slowly and gradually.—The value and freight of shipping, for instance, fell at once to nearly one half of their maximum amount in the war, and trading and manufacturing establishments in general experienced a like defalcation.—Traders, however, more accustomed than agriculturists, to great vicissitudes, were better prepared to meet and to bear the change. Instead of indulging a vain hope that Parliament should change the nature of things, they endeavoured to conform to the altered circumstances of the times, and their season of trial being over, commerce and manufacture have revived, and

are again prosperous. To an enquiry into the causes of the continued distress of the agricultural class, (for no one can deny the existence of such distress, though in a degree far short of what has been sometimes stated), the agricultural advocates themselves have in some degree furnished an answer. A few months ago, a statement was put forth under the signature of "a Freeholder of £20,000. a year," which, from being republished in most of the town and country newspapers, and constantly quoted at agricultural meetings, seems to have been reputed a just representation of the grounds of the agricultural claim to Parliamentary relief.—This unfortunate gentleman states that in 1793, his father succeeded to an inheritance of £8000. a year; that, in the year 1803, it had risen in rent to £20,000. a year, and descended to the complainant in 1810, but charged with £12,000. per ann. for interest of mortgages; that, since the termination of the war, the rent has fallen two-fifths, that is to £12,000. consequently

it only pays the interest of the mortgage debt, so that the Proprietor is left destitute, and claims the interference of the legislature to relieve him from the obligation of paying more than three-fifths of his debts. Had a case been invented to display unbounded profusion and want of foresight, he could scarcely have ventured on a statement more extravagant. — Improvidence and dissipation so reckless, are not, I trust, frequent—but it appears that land-owners in general acted upon the confidence that peace would not only uphold, but increase, war rents.—The effects of a return to peace heretofore induced that expectation; but they overlooked the depression which former wars occasioned; and that the revival consequent on a cessation of war was then as natural as the decline of prices in the present instance. It often happens in mining countries that the income of an estate is doubled or trebled for a season.—No prudent owner, however, would venture to raise his establishment and expenditure, on a permanent scale to

the extent of an increase so precarious and temporary—yet, would that be less preposterous, because the mining profits might by possibility continue, whereas that which the war alone created and upheld could not but decline, when its support ceased; “*sublatâ causâ, tollitur effectus.*”

That the extraordinary augmentation of income produced a like improvident increase of expenditure among the tenantry, we learn from the agricultural statements given in evidence to the Committee of the House of Lords in 1814—the cost of cultivating 100 acres producing £200. rent (in the county of Kent) is thus given :

Rent	-	-	-	-	£ 200
Tithe	-	-	-	-	7
Taxes	-	-	-	-	20
Parochial rates	-	-	-	-	50
Wear and tear	-	-	-	-	16
Labour	-	-	-	-	312
Team	-	-	-	-	232
Seed	-	-	-	-	171
Interest	-	-	-	-	150
					<hr/>
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Here we find the rent, instead of being one-third of the gross produce, is little more than one-sixth! the cost of labour, rates, taxes, tithe, and seed, instead of one rent as formerly, is here carried to £892. or nearly $4\frac{1}{2}$ rents! The import of *Gentleman Farming* is well known, but this description of it would have been almost incredible, had it not been solemnly attested by the farmers themselves.—Extravagant as it appears, it is possible; for the nobleman's coach costs ten times as much as the hackney coach, while it does not perform a fourth part of the work. If this statement was nearly correct, it is plain that the principal abatement, to meet ~~of rent and tenants' expenditures, that~~ a fall of prices, must be found in the cost, of labour, ~~which~~ has fallen almost to its price before the war; for after all the clamour raised about tithe, rate, and taxes, here is an instance in which tithe was only $\frac{1}{167}$ part of the total outgoings, rates $\frac{1}{23}$ part, and taxes $\frac{1}{57}$ part, and of this last three-fourths was the property tax, and most of the remainder horse tax, since repealed,

so that the direct taxes now paid by the farmer are little more than nothing. It may perhaps be objected, that since the year 1820, farming produce has fallen below the previous average: comparing the average price of wheat with flour, there seems to be ~~the~~ ^{the same} deception in the mode of striking the average: the price of standard wheat should be to that of *fine flour*, as 6 to 5.—In the year 1821, the general price of fine flour was 50s. and in 1822, 40s. a sack: consequently the price of good wheat should have been in the former year, 60s. and in the last 48s. a quarter; and although there was much sold under those prices, it was, in general of inferior quality. The best criterion, after all, is the value of land; estates at this time let readily at much more, perhaps £50. per cent. more rent than they did before the war.—Supposing the price of produce the same, this is owing to improvements in the art of husbandry, which enable the cultivator to pay increased rent, notwithstanding the increase of rates.—

Such, it is well known, is the case in several branches of manufacture, enabling the manufacturer to bring his goods to market cheaper *now* than he could before the late war. What then, after this discussion, are the conclusions, at which it is the object to arrive?

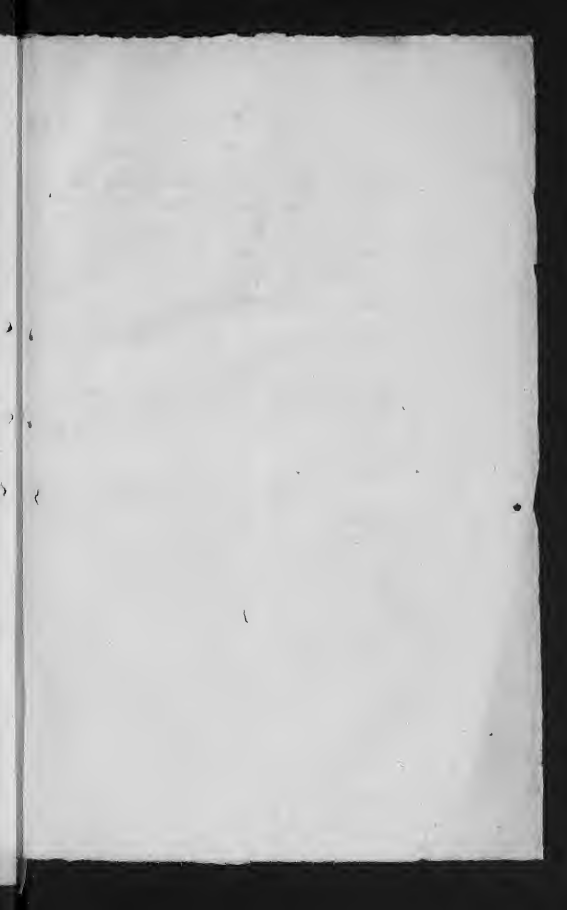
1st. That although the agricultural class is one of the most important orders of the state, and one which cannot be too sedulously upheld, yet, that it is not the *only* class whose interests deserve the attention and care of Government.

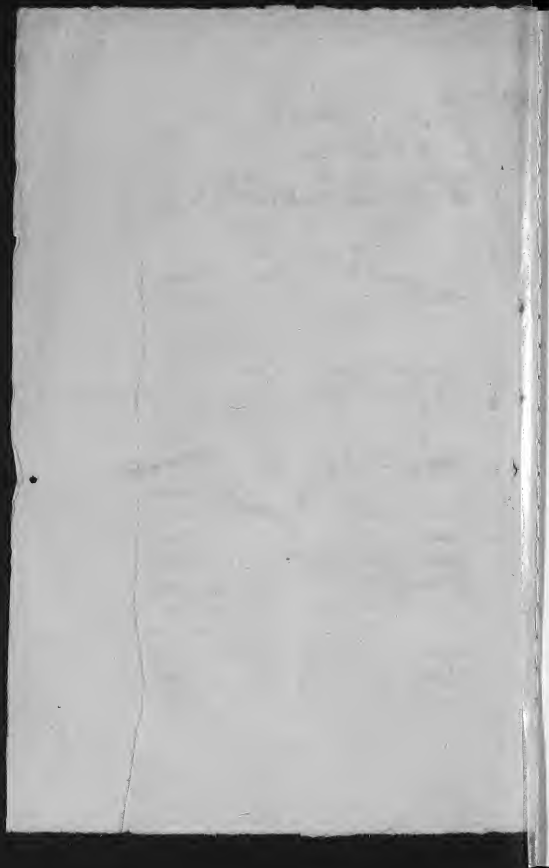
2dly. That so long as the late war gives to agriculture more in increased profits than it takes in increased rates and taxes, the war will have been a benefit (in a pecuniary view of the subject) and not a burthen, to the landed interest.

3dly. That until rents fall to their numerical amount before the war, the landed interest will not have felt the burthen of the war in an equal proportion with the monied interest.

Lastly. As rents are still considerably

higher than they were before the war, the Agriculturist, whatever claim he may have as a matter of favour, or expediency, or compassion, to relief, he can have none in justice or equity, to a relief injurious to the rest of the Community.







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